Strategy Research Project

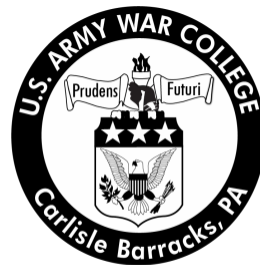# An Army in Transition: Maintaining the Competitive Edge

by

Colonel Curtis A. Johnson
Unites States Army

United States Army War College
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AN ARMY IN TRANSITION: MAINTAINING THE COMPETITIVE EDGE

by

Colonel Curtis A. Johnson
Unites States Army

Professor Charles D. Allen
Project Adviser

U.S. Army War College
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Colonel Curtis A. Johnson

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The United States Army still remains the most powerful land force in the world but faces a number of significant changes and complex challenges after a decade at war. The Army is in a period of transition because of the U.S. Military drawdown in Iraq and Afghanistan. If the Army reverts to the same home station practices seen prior to Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, junior leaders will no longer have the same autonomy to innovate, as they have done over the past ten years of conflict. The experiences and immense responsibilities that junior officers had while deployed created agile and extremely creative leaders. These skills however will quickly atrophy if changes to how the Army operates within a garrison environment are not made. This large talent pool of junior leaders will shape the Army of the 21st Century – given the chance.

AN ARMY IN TRANSITION: MAINTAINING THE COMPETITIVE EDGE

> Men and women in the prime of their professional lives, who may have been responsible for the lives of scores or hundreds of troops, or millions of dollars in assistance, or engaging or reconciling warring tribes, may find themselves in a cube all day reformatting PowerPoint slides…the consequences of this terrify me.[1]
>
> —Secretary of Defense Robert Gates

With the withdrawals from Iraq and Afghanistan, the Army will embark on a critical transition that will shape the next generation of leaders. The end of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan is more than a change of mission; it is a critical transition that requires a psychological shift for junior and senior officers alike. Then Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Commander, General Dempsey, conveyed the important task of managing transitions, by saying;

> An insight that has remained with me from my own professional development comes from a comment General Eric Shinseki made when he spoke to my class of brand new brigadier generals several years ago. General Shinseki was Chief of Staff at the time and someone asked him, "If we only remember one thing, what is a general officer's principal responsibility to the institution?" His answer was, "Manage transitions."[2]

Prior to Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), the Army stressed transforming Soldiers and leaders to be more flexible, adaptable, creative and innovative. After a decade at war junior leaders have acquired these skills by dealing with the complexities, unpredictability, and uncertainties of counterinsurgency and nation-building.[3] Senior leaders must address the question of how to make the post-war Army engaging enough for Soldiers accustomed to operating in a combat environment and then keep them motivated so they want to stay in the Army. "They have so much experience; we will need them down the road," commented

Fort Hood commander Lt. Gen. Donald Campbell Jr., when discussing the importance

of retaining junior officers serving in OEF and OIF.[4] The challenge for the Army as it

transitions to a garrison environment is to create conditions that allow this cohort of

innovative and adaptive leaders, specifically midgrade noncommissioned and company

grade officers to exercise these newfound skills or risk losing this invaluable potential.

This paper begins with an overview of how the centralized and directive Army that

existed prior to the recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan often stifled junior leader

innovation. The second section, Breaking the Mold, describes a new environment that

allowed junior leaders the freedom to make decisions, solve difficult problems, and

develop into the agile junior leaders we see across the Army today. The paper

concludes with a look at how culture and trust are crucial to maintaining this competitive

edge as the Army transitions to more of a garrison environment.

<u>Stifling Innovation</u>

Prior to OEF and OIF the Army was very directive in how it approached small unit

training and basic administrative tasks. The centralized way that a higher headquarters

dictated training was in most cases detrimental to the development of innovative junior

leaders, as it left little room for individual creativity. As today's units return to home

station and the likelihood of another deployment lessens, leaders and Soldiers are

quickly returning to a garrison mindset experienced prior to OIF and OEF. There are

several examples of how previous training events and procedures in the garrison

environment were so regimented that junior leaders had little to no opportunity to be

innovative or tailor their units training.[5]

The very centralized and controlling environment common in the garrison

environment prior to OEF and OIF did not allow junior leaders the opportunity to make

decisions and work through the positive and negative consequences of the results of those decisions; therefore, never learning how to fail, try again, and succeed.[6] Retired Lieutenant General Barno submits the adaptable and innovative officer and NCO leaders of today rival that of the WWII Greatest Generation. However, he highlights concerns the Army could soon revert back to the home station mindset which existed prior to OEF and OIF and where junior leaders might "…leave the Army in droves rather than stay in a stifling over-centralized, power-point-centric Army."[7]

As a majority of the force finds itself in a garrison environment there are a number of ideas, tasks, required training, and unforeseen requirements that will quickly consume a junior leader's time to execute their own unit level training. In the monogram, *Stifled Innovation? Developing Tomorrow's Leaders Today*, Dr. Leonard Wong examined how the garrison environment that existed prior to the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom was counterproductive to creating adaptive and creative leaders. He highlighted three main factors that created a controlling, centralized environment normally found in garrison. First, the higher headquarters directed numerous training requirements, which took away the ability of company commanders to plan their own training. Second, higher headquarters dictated how the training would be executed thus taking away a commander's initiative when conducting training. Lastly, senior leaders continually encroached on time allocated to junior leaders for training by saddling them with administrative requirements and mismanaged taskings making it almost impossible to accomplish scheduled training.[8]

It is important to further explore why and how these factors described by Dr. Wong stifled innovation in junior leaders so the Army does not repeat these same

mistakes. As with many organizational processes, the Army's established practices often took on a life of their own, as very centralized processes cease to be a means to an end and become ends in themselves.[9] Junior leaders follow the processes not because they are effective or efficient, but because they are required by a higher headquarters. The amount of "nonmission" training required of our contemporary junior leaders and commanders will continue to compete with their ability to plan and conduct small unit training unless significant changes to these centralized processes are made. If we return to an environment that is extremely directive in nature and exceedingly control centric, it will likely result in what Dr. Wong described as an unpredictable and stifling environment consisting of requirements, structure, and supervision that stymies a junior officer's ability to innovate.[10]

The training requirements placed on junior leaders and especially company commanders were examined closely prior to Operation Iraqi Freedom, and the results were alarming. The analysis showed that in 2002 directed training requirements from all levels of command, from the Department of the Army down to the Brigade level, required approximately 297 days. The 2010 *Army Training Circular 25-8* stated the Army-wide standard for training availability is 242 days after excluding weekends and Federal holidays.[11] So the obvious question becomes "what training do junior leaders not accomplish and who makes that determination?" In most cases it will be the nonmission-related training that gets pushed aside. However, even if 50 percent of these requirements would be eliminated or ignored, only 21 days would be given back to a junior leader.[12] This would hardly be enough time for a junior leader to plan,

execute, and assess his or her own training - - all critical activities for encouraging a junior officer to become more innovative.

While the topics of innovation and adaptability are taught in the Basic Officer Leader Course (BOLC), the warrior leader course (WLC), and even on occasion included as part of an Army Blackboard training requirement, the real development occurs when junior leaders operate in an intent-centric environment which was common to both OIF and OEF. The intent-centric operating environment in both Iraq and Afghanistan has provided opportunities for junior officers to be innovative, adaptive, and mentally agile rather than the plan-centric operations common to the garrison environment.[13]

Unlike the operating environment in OIF and OEF, the garrison environment often creates conditions where junior officers are not only being told what to train on, but how to do it. Much of the planning responsibilities bestowed upon junior officers while deployed shift to a higher echelon when in garrison to ensure training is practical, realistic, and that it addresses all required tasks down to the individual level. In addition to the planning responsibility being stripped away by a higher headquarters, so are many of the assessments required throughout the training cycle.[14] The main purpose for this centralization is to minimize the risk by requiring higher headquarters to certify units as trained rather than small unit training being validated by company or battalion commanders.[15]

Though the training provided is effective, it is also extremely centralized and, in many cases, over-structured. This type of training produces confident, competent soldiers; however, it is unlikely the centralized approach will build an environment which

stimulates innovation as it limits junior officers from searching for new ways to do new things. Searching for new ways to solve problems and taking on the associated risk in the garrison training environment is critical for junior officers in order to build the necessary skills to succeed in the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environment most will find themselves once deployed.

Another shortcoming of centralized operations in garrison is they do not build the trust essential for decentralized operations in the deployed environment. Creating and sustaining a garrison environment that builds trust, is tolerant of mistakes, and allows junior officers to be as adaptive and innovative as they were while serving in the deployed environment is essential for future success. If not addressed by leaders at all levels, the advantages and new skill sets gained by a cohort of junior officers over the past decade at war will simply wither away. Then Major General James Dubik in 1992 highlighted the risk of a centralized garrison environment,

> A unit cannot operate centralized in garrison and decentralized in the field. A commander is mistaken if he believes that such a conceptual shift is possible. Subordinates who, in garrison, are used to deferring decisions until consulting with, and receiving approval from the battalion commander will not suddenly be able to willing to make the judgments required of them in training or in combat.[16]

The environment junior officers operated in while deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan is very different from that of the centralized, directive garrison environment described by Wong. The large area of responsibility given to units while deployed in support of OIF and OEF forced senior commanders to empower their subordinates and trust them to operate within the leader's intent. Junior leaders operating in the deployed environment were given the opportunity, and in most cases, encouraged to experiment with solutions to the complex problems they frequently encountered. They developed

and implemented these solutions with little guidance and subsequently learned from their own mistakes. The process of learning through trial and error is crucial when developing leaders who can think critically, act autonomously, and accurately assess the impact of their decisions. However, it is extremely difficult for junior leaders to innovate in the garrison environment described by Wong. The centralized decision making, numerous higher headquarter requirements, and a high level of supervision that stifled almost any effort to innovate prior to 9/11 will again do so if the Army is unable to break the mold that shaped the Army in the last decade of the 20th Century.

Breaking the Mold

In 2003 then Army Chief of Staff General Peter J. Schoomaker stated, "To win this war [referring to the GWOT] and to be prepared for any other task our Nation may assign us; we must have a campaign quality Army with a joint and expeditionary mindset. A fundamental underpinning of this mindset is a culture of innovation."[17] BG David A. Fastabend and Mr. Robert H. Simpson addressed these underpinnings in a 2004 article, "Adapt or Die, The Imperative for a Culture of Innovation in the United States Army."

Adapt or Die purported a culture of innovation which then existed in the operational Army as a result of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and cited examples of how Soldiers and leaders have adapted and used innovation to overcome a determined adversary.[18] Fastabend and Simpson used *FM 22-100, Leadership* to define the difference between climate and culture, as there is an important distinction between the two. They stated, "Culture is a longer lasting, more complex set of shared expectations than climate. While climate is how people feel about their organization right now, culture consists of the shared attitudes, values, goals and practices that

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characterize the larger institutions. It's deeply rooted in long held beliefs, customs and practices."[19] Fastabend and Simpson further described a culture of innovation as an environment within where people are invested in the organization's success and feel a responsibility to implement new and better ways to accomplish organizational objectives. They stated a culture of innovation is typified by an environment that encourages people to try different paths, test new ideas to the point of failure, and learn from the experience.[20]

Two years after Dr. Wong's aforementioned monograph on why junior officer innovation had been stifled by bureaucratic garrison practices, he published a complementary piece arguing junior officers dealing with the complexities of postwar Iraq are being developed into adaptable, innovative, and independent leaders. In the monograph, *Developing Adaptive Leaders: The Crucible Experience of Operation Iraqi Freedom,* Wong outlined how postwar Iraq required junior leaders to deal with ambiguity, change, and complexity not present in the garrison environment he described in his previous article.[21] Wong began by addressing several of the Army's guiding documents which emphasize the importance of leadership and the type of leaders required in the future Army. The 1999 United States Army Vision Statement effectively summed up why so much effort was being placed on developing agile and adaptive leaders, "We are about leadership; it is our stock in trade, and it is what makes us different."[22] The Army often espoused the importance of adaptability and developing innovative leaders, but its culture remained very hierarchical. However, the complex and ambiguous environment in Afghanistan and Iraq made development of those skills a must for mission success.

The importance of adaptability is not unique to the Army as it often emerges as a common theme with our civilian counterparts. Dr. Wong cited prominent leadership researcher Warren Bennis to help explain how the opportunities junior officers have while deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom created a cohort of adaptive and innovate junior leaders. Bennis argued effective leaders are exposed to at least one intense, transformational experience, which he labeled a crucible experience. The crucible experience is an opportunity and a test that will teach a person who he or she truly is. [23] He stated the critical quality of a leader that determines how they respond to the crucible experience is adaptive capacity. Adaptive capacity provides leaders the ability to adapt quickly and intelligently to continuous change.

Wong held that OIF was a crucible experience for many of today's junior officers (OEF is also a crucible experience), and despite the Army's bureaucratic nature, these officers were given opportunities to be innovative and build their adaptive capacity as a result of the environment they operated in daily.[24] The complexity of the environment found in both Afghanistan and Iraq forced leaders to operate in a more decentralized way creating unique opportunities that junior leaders simply don't have while in garrison.

There are two primary reasons the deployed environment provides more opportunities for junior leaders to be creative, innovative, and build upon the adaptive capacity Bennis argued is critical to developing adaptive leaders. The first is the increased complexity of the deployed environment in contrast to those experienced in garrison. Junior leaders are often given very prescriptive tasks while in the garrison, and the complexities of these tasks are minimal, whereas the complexity found in Afghanistan and Iraq are many and stem from a variety of sources. One major source of

this complexity is the number of roles junior leaders must fill when executing

counterinsurgency and nation-building operations.[25] In addition to the difficulties of

maintaining communications in an austere environment the communications officer may

also be the battalion knowledge manager, information operations officer, and the PAO,

all of which are tasks normally reserved for a trained technical expert.[26] Junior leaders

have to constantly shift roles and quickly adapt to the ever-changing environment

presented in OIF and OEF, forced them to become more adaptable and agile as they

took on jobs well outside what the Army trained them for. Wong stated, "They are

developing the leadership ability that the Army has been seeking for many years, yet

has struggled to capture."[27]

Wong's 2002 study reported the centralized and overly structured Army system

created an oppressive culture that encouraged in our junior leaders to be, "reactive

instead of proactive thought, compliance instead of creativity, and adherence instead of

audacity."[28] The vast experiences junior leaders have had in the complex environment

of Iraq and Afghanistan provided an opportunity to lead, learn from their mistakes, and

become extremely adaptable and innovative – all the qualities the Army is looking for in

the 21st century.[29]

In a speech at Fort Bragg on 14 December 2011, President Obama declared the

official end to all operations in Iraq, stating all US forces would redeploy prior to the end

of the year and reinforcing the transition to a postwar-era is well underway. Colonel

Charles Allen (U.S. Army Ret.) posited the health of today's Army after a decade at war

is something that must be closely examined by senior leaders as they chart the course

for the future. Allen offered that the health of America's Army can be gauged by its

people, specifically the officer corps.[30] This is why it is critical for the senior leadership to reflect on lessons learned from previous wars and to factor in the large cohort of adaptive, innovative, and independent junior leaders that are the byproduct of a decade at war as they plan for the future.

America's record regarding its ability to predict and prepare for the next war has been bleak at best.[31] The Korean War was no exception and provides several lessons learned about what can happen when relaxing military alertness and rapidly downsizing the Army after war. During the post-cold war drawdown then Army Chief of Staff, General Gordon Sullivan, used the slogan "No More Task Force Smiths" as a catchphrase to highlight the importance of maintaining an effective fighting force capable of answering our nation's needs especially during postwar transitions, and in this case World War II (WWII).[32] Task Force Smith, part of the constabulary force in Japan, was "…woefully unprepared for combat *as* a result of too little training, manning shortfalls, and minimal levels of equipment."[33] Though there are many interpretations as to why the United States military failed in Korea, what seems clear is that senior leaders failed to visualize the nature of the next war and didn't create a culture or capabilities that would capitalize on the enormous amount of talent produced by the experiences of WWII.

Another historical example, the Vietnam War, demonstrates how a commander who trusted his subordinates can succeed in combating a determined and decentralized enemy through decentralized capabilities and distributed operations. When General Abrams assumed command from General Westmoreland in June of 1968, he

immediately changed the U.S. conduct of the war, as he understood the war was not solely about destruction of enemy forces but control of the population.[34]

Abrams had an immense trust of his subordinates and used decentralized command in order to provide security to the people of South Vietnam by putting company-sized units near South Vietnam's villages and hamlets to protect the population from coercion and terrorism.[35] He trusted his subordinate leadership in the chain of command to carry out his intent by redefining success as population security; he created a mutual understanding that inspired both the individual and small unit initiatives that were critical to Abram's overall strategy. Even as a WWII tank battalion commander, General Abrams clearly understood the importance of trust and empowering his subordinates, going as far as to encourage dissent amongst his subordinates during discussions concerning policy and procedures. Taylor and Rosenbach in, *Military Leadership: In Pursuit of Excellence,* recounted,

> Abrams made sure that his young officers were not inhibited in these discussions. In fact, stimulated by his challenges, they argued with him constantly. Usually, he would let them persuade him to do it their way. Maybe that way was not always as good as the way he would have done it, but—having argued so strongly for their own solutions—they were committed to making them work. Abrams, of course, knew this full well. [36]

These two historical examples demonstrate why it is essential the Army manage this 21st century transition carefully, recognizing the military withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan is more than just the end to combat operations. Change is simply physical and situational (i.e., going from a deployed to a nondeployed environment). Transition, on the other hand, is psychological; it is a process both junior and senior leaders alike will go through as they internalize the details of the changes this new situation brings about. Transitions start with an ending and the failure to identify and prepare junior

leaders for the changes brought about by the end of the deployed environment will be problematic at best.[37]

The large talent pool of junior leaders developed from the past ten years at war must be leveraged, and leaders at all levels must continue to encourage the adaptability and innovation demonstrated in Iraq and Afghanistan. The challenge the Army now faces is to transition to the nondeployed environment without losing its competitive edge. This will be a difficult transition given the Army's natural tendency to gravitate towards the bureaucratic and centralized Army of the 20th Century. There are two vitally important areas to consider. First, understanding the Army is in a critical transition period and leaders at all levels can effectively manage the transition by trusting subordinates to execute mission orders and commander's intent. Second, creating and sustaining a culture that encourages and enables today's agile and adaptive junior leaders to be the Army's senior leaders in 2020.

Sustaining Trust

Webster defines trust as a firm belief or confidence in the honesty, integrity, reliability and justice of another person.[38] Trust between leaders and their subordinates is an essential element to developing today's junior leaders. General Dempsey, in "Mission Command," provides a comprehensive overview of why commanders need to embrace mission command concepts and the importance of institutionalizing these concepts. Leaders at all levels must heed this guidance and allow their subordinates the autonomy to execute mission orders based on their training and experience, thus creating loyalty and most importantly trust up and down the chain-of-command.

COL (Ret) Allen addressed the importance of trust in, "Assessing the Army Profession," stating the lack of trust within the Army and its organizations is linked to the

perception of a culture that fails to demonstrate candor, does not permit honest mistakes, and where top-down loyalty is perceived as weak.[39] Often when discussing leadership and trust the focus is on subordinates trusting their leadership; however, when addressing the need to maintain the current cohort of agile and innovative leaders the reverse must be explored. Major Grice, in "A Matter of Trust," held there is a double standard that must be eradicated from leadership policies focused on the home station environment. He used an example of a Marine Corporal coming back from post deployment leave was subjected to a litany of policies that undermine the trust built between leaders and subordinates while serving in combat.[40] The Corporal, just a few weeks prior returning to his home station, lead his team as they conducted combat operations and made life and death decisions every day. However, once back home the special trust and confidence demonstrated while deployed is quickly replaced with checklist and restrictions. A culture of mistrust is ever-present in the home station environment, one that treats junior leaders as a potential liability rather than an innovative leader who can accomplish the most difficult of missions with clear intent and much deserved trust.[41]

Leaders will have to assume risk in the home station environment by trusting their subordinates and allow for failure without blame as they did while in combat to ensure the innovation demonstrated by junior leaders while deployed is not stifled. An analogy of teaching a child to ride his bicycle is helpful, as it illustrates the importance of trust and allowing failure without condemnation. [42] When teaching a child to ride his bicycle, the adult holds on to the seat and run alongside and let go, knowing he will initially fail. The adult helps him back up after dusting him off and encourage him to try

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again, and eventually he will be able to ride without assistance. This would not be possible if there was not trust and an understanding the child would have to fail in order to succeed.[43] Leaders need to let go of the bike seat in the home station environment and assume some risk, just as they did when sending junior leaders to combat outpost with only mission orders knowing their subordinates may have to fail a few times in order to eventually succeed.

Trust can change rapidly based on circumstances and experiences as seen in OIF and OEF where trust across the force increased substantially based on necessity and an ever-changing environment. Trust is fluid and hard to rebuild once lost. It is also true that a long history of trust can assist when problems and crises confront either an individual or an entire organization. As 38th Chief of Staff General Raymond T. Odierno stated, "Our Army is the nation's force of decisive action, a relevant and highly effective force for a wide range of missions. Trust is the bedrock of our honored profession -- trust between each other, trust between Soldiers and leaders…"[44] The trust leaders and their subordinates shared while operating in Iraq and Afghanistan over the past ten years will quickly diminish if the level of trust, responsibility, and autonomy also decrease during the transition to a home station environment. If leaders allow their subordinates to make mistakes and standby them rather than chastise them, it will be seen as a learning experience and create the necessary trust junior leaders need to remain innovative. Trust is the foundation for much of the environment leaders want to create and must become a touchstone of the Army's culture.

A Cultural Change

The element of Army culture that existed in the garrison environment prior to OIF and OEF must change so that the trust required to maintain the innovation and creativity

gained by this cohort of junior leaders is not stifled. Every organization has a culture and whether it works for or against a leader can make the difference between success and failure. There is a vast amount of literature regarding organizational culture and a myriad of different definitions. Most, however, are easily summed up by simply stating it is the way people think and act within the organization. For the United States military, Fastabend and Simpson's definition of a culture of innovation is appropriate:

> …an environment within which every single person in the organization is invested in the organization's success and feels a responsibility to implement new and better ways to achieve organizational objectives. People are encouraged to try alternative paths, test ideas to the point of failure, and learn from the experience. Experimentation and prudent risk taking are admired and encouraged.[45]

Edgar Schein, a leading scholar on organizational culture, stated the forces created in social and organizational situations deriving from culture are powerful, and if leaders do not understand the operation of these forces they will become victim to them.[46] The Army cannot afford to fall victim to a culture that does not allow for innovative and independent junior leaders to exercise autonomy when given a mission. This is exactly the caution expressed in many of the Army's guiding documents on leadership in 2001.[47] In "*Organizational Culture: Applying A Hybrid Model to the U.S. Army*," United States Army War College professors submitted the Army has transitioned to a professional Army in a complex environment, and that aspects of culture need to change toward a more autonomous and learning-based model.[48] However, the question of how an Army culture that was built on centralized control by necessity can loosen the reins enough to encourage decentralized innovation in the home station environment remains.

The organizational culture article mentioned in the preceding paragraph submits the work of Geert Hofstede and the follow-on Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness Research Program (GLOBE Study) are useful in understanding an organization's underlying assumptions.[49] The Globe Study outlined nine major attributes of culture, which when quantified are referred to as dimensions.[50] Two of these dimensions, power distance and assertiveness, are particularly important as leaders attempt to create a culture that promotes trust and the innovation sought after by the 21st Century Army.

Hofstede defined the dimension of power distance as the degree to which people in a hierarchical situation perceive a greater or lesser ability to influence each other's behavior.[51] When looking at power distance through an organizational lens, it reflects the extent to which an organization accepts and endorses authority, power differences, and status privileges.[52] Operations in Iraq and Afghanistan demonstrated that the best understanding comes from the bottom up, not from the top down. Leaders can narrow the power distance between their subordinates by building trust, soliciting ideas, and genuinely listening to them. By allowing subordinates to have input on critical decisions and the autonomy to operate freely within the commander's intent will go far in building trust, narrowing the power distance, and eventually help to shape a cultural in the Army that facilitates innovation rather than stifle it. A quote from LTG (Ret) Gus Pagonis sums up how trust can help to flatten an organization and narrow the power distance:

> One of the leader's continuing goals is to build trust; and one way to do that is to demonstrate that you are willing to place your trust in someone else. Recognizing and placing value on the intellect of subordinates, granting them autonomy in defining objectives and meeting them, is a key motivational device and it doesn't cost anything. Give them enough

guidance so that they don't flounder and waste time, and then get out of their way.[53]

The second dimension, assertiveness, refers to the degree to which individuals are forceful or confrontational in social relationships.[54] While the Army encourages leaders at all levels to be aggressive in battle, the hierarchical nature of the Army makes it difficult for subordinates to disagree with their superiors.[55] Leaders must encourage thoughtful disagreement, as it can serve as a springboard to new ideas and better solutions. Gerras, Wong, and Allen used a quote from Donald Vandergriff, an Army adaptability advocate, which captures the importance of assertiveness, "To succeed, Army leaders must stop regarding criticism as disloyal, and must actively encourage critical thinking."[56] Subordinates will often conform to the opinions of their superior or group rather than providing thoughtful dissent simply out of fear of being shunned or marginalized.

Cultural change in itself is difficult and becomes increasingly so as the size and age of an organization increases. Thus, leaders in an institution as large and established as the Army must be ever cognizant in how they embed and transmit culture. Edger Schein presented culture-embedding mechanisms to describe ways leaders embed their beliefs, values, and assumptions into their organizational culture. He developed twelve embedding mechanisms divided into primary and secondary to highlight the differences between those behavioral things leaders do and the more formal mechanism which support and reinforce the primary messages.[57]

The primary embedding mechanisms include six major tools leaders can exercise when attempting to teach their organization how to perceive, think, feel and act based on their own conscious and unconscious convictions.[58] Four of the six primary

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embedding mechanisms are particularly important as leaders work to create a culture which will allow junior leader innovation to thrive. The first mechanism is *what leaders pay attention to, measure, and control on a regular basis*. If leaders are more concerned about the accomplishment of the mission than subordinates failing as they work through possible solutions it will send a strong message throughout the organization. It will quickly become understood that creative solutions are what define success: Subordinates will therefore trust their leaders to overwrite mistakes allowing them the ability to explore innovative ways to accomplish their given mission.

The next embedding mechanism is *how leaders react to critical incidents and organizational crises.* If during a crisis or chaotic time a leader continues to trust his subordinates to help solve thorny issues and if necessary absorbs much of the blame, the entire organization will see trust is not just something exercised during the "good times." This will strengthen the trust between leaders and subordinates and create an environment where the desire to develop creative solutions outweighs the concern of reprisal for failure.

The third embedding mechanism, *how leaders allocate rewards and status*, is one of the most critical as it can have the greatest amount of impact on an individual's career. When junior leaders refer to rewards they are often thinking in terms of their evaluations. When leaders reward their adaptable and innovative subordinates with high marks on their evaluation reports, it can have lasting impact on the organizations culture. When junior leaders trust their leaders will reward innovation and creativity in the form of a stellar report card, positive reinforcement, and autonomy to apply their

training and experience to daily problems it has a galvanizing effect throughout the organization.

The last embedding mechanism that has a significant impact on creating a culture that promotes innovation focuses on the leader's use of *deliberate role-modeling, teaching and coaching*. When senior leaders are consistent in the message they are sending to subordinates regarding the importance of trusting subordinates and creating a command climate that fosters innovation, it reinforces the importance of caring for a junior leader's professional and personal growth.

Schein also outlined the importance of secondary or reinforcement mechanisms; however, Gerras, Wong, and Allen posited these mechanisms alone will not change a culture as they must be aligned with the embedding mechanisms discussed above or change becomes almost impossible.[59] There are several reinforcing mechanisms which need to be aligned with the primary embedding mechanisms previously discussed to make cultural change possible. The first reinforcing mechanism is *organizational design and structure*. Leaders may espouse their desire to create an environment that encourages junior leader innovation and creativity while at the same time do little or nothing to flatten the hierarchical structure that often suffocates innovation.

The next reinforcing mechanism highlights the importance of *organizational systems and procedures*. When junior leaders are deployed and given a large amount of autonomy and flexibility in the execution of critical missions, only to return to a garrison environment that requires a significant amount of supervision for even the simplest of task, it will be near impossible to effect change. This is because of a gross misalignment between the embedding and reinforcing mechanisms described by

Schein. As an example, young noncommissioned officers in Afghanistan are entrusted to lead fire teams on complex counterinsurgency missions with a simple task and purpose, however, once back in garrison they are not authorized to execute simple tasks, such as signing for range ammunition.

The last reinforcing mechanism discussed relates *to the use of formal statements of organizational philosophy*. Stating that innovation and creativity are important in a commander's philosophy is not likely to create the kind of change needed to change culture. However, when combined with a commander who routinely rewards subordinates with stellar evaluations and frequent reinforcement based on their ability to innovate and solve difficult issues with little to no guidance can go a long way to affect change.

When leaders are consistent with their actions and their words, the embedding mechanisms will reinforce a leaders own beliefs, values, and assumptions. Also key is aligning the reinforcing mechanisms to the leader's espoused beliefs and the environment they wish to create. When primary embedding mechanisms and secondary or reinforcement mechanisms are not aligned, a leader will quickly lose the trust of his or her subordinates, because as the old adage goes; actions speak louder than words. Understanding how to embed and transmit culture within an organization is essential as leaders attempt to create a garrison environment that more closely mirrors that of Afghanistan and Iraq. In doing so, the competitive advantage gained by the Army's junior leaders is more likely to carryover during this critical transition.

Conclusion

Given the opportunity, those junior leaders who were able to adapt, innovate, and continually learn from their mistakes while deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq will

continue to do so. During this critical transition senior leaders must trust in their subordinates to execute their intent and focus on the outcome and individual leader not the system or the process. For a cultural change to begin it is essential for leaders to assume risk and except a certain amount of uncertainty in the home station environment just as they did while operating while deployed. The values, beliefs, and principles of a leader must be aligned with his or her actions, behaviors, and decisions for culture change to advance.

The leadership challenge is to reduce the gap that exists between beliefs and behaviors and align the embedding and reinforcing mechanisms discussed by Schein, so that cultural change can take hold. As Fastabend and Simpson offered, "In the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environment we face for the foreseeable future, if we were to choose one advantage over our adversaries it would certainly be this: *to be superior in the art of learning and adaptation*. This is the imperative for a culture of innovation in the United States Army."[60] The junior leaders that excelled in the complex and uncertain environments of Afghanistan and Iraq will provide the competitive advantage needed to defeat tomorrow's adversaries, as long as senior leaders continue to trust and strive to create a culture that does not stifle their innovation.

<u>Endnotes</u>

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[20] Ibid.

[21] Wong, "Developing Adaptive Leaders", 1.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid., 2.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., 3-4.

[26] These were actual task or positions assigned to my Battalion S-6 while deployed in support of OEF X. This is one example of a junior leader performing a variety of jobs, in addition to his primary position, normally reserved for a trained technical expert or specific functional area.

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